

"The Anointed"

By

Harry Lyman Koopman

Reprinted from the Ariel, Burlington, VT., May, 1891

To Miss Holmes

From her friend,

H. L. Koopman.



“The Anointed”

* * *

A Novel of the Twenty-fifth Century.

* * *

IMAGINE words made the slaves instead of the masters of expression. Imagine a style changing with every play of thought, running through all prose forms, shifting to poetry at will, and employing every metrical device, anon leaving words behind and escaping into pure melody, or, lastly, when the gamut has been exhausted, soaring into silence, the music of the spheres. All this, not in regular sequence, but naturally, as the faithful reflection of the iridescent mind. Who would not shrink from the attempt to put into lame prose even the outline of a work so manifold? Yet, so far as the impressions made by the novel submit themselves to language, they tell the following story. A story, be it remembered, not to be read, but to be heard; for printing in the twenty-fifth century will, for the most part, have been displaced by the phonograph, and entirely so for works of art or amusement.

The theme is the prophet's never outgrown mission, which is unfolded in the career of the poet Wilfred Lawton. Born in a society that had realized perfect freedom, and reared among the triumphs of industrial organization, he lived as one out of harmony with his time. The representative of the world's contemporary spirit was the old poet Wendon, who had descended from a time when, though poverty had long since vanished, survivals of discontent had not ceased to appear. He had entered life just as the dawn of industrial development was merging into its perfect day, and he was therefore not cut off from the traditions and even the relics of ancient evils. He realized "the horrible pit and the miry clay" from which society had been uplifted, and the theme of his song was, naturally, the glories of freedom and industrial progress. His verse was a psalm of victory. Popularity had come to him early, and, as even in the twenty-fifth century men will prefer to hear of their virtues rather than their failings, he had gone on from favor to fame. He

was the Lope de Vega, the Goethe of his time, with none to dispute his supremacy.

The elder poet, however, is not the hero of the novel, and this mention of him fills a disproportionate space. The book is chiefly occupied with the story of Lawton's growth in mind and character, of his writings, with the mental processes that led to them, and of his continued failure to win the public ear. Men admitted his force and his knowledge, but, because his style was the perfect garment of unwelcome thought, they called it obscure and unmusical. To Lawton the triumphs of freedom and industry were, and from their nature must remain, merely negative. Indispensable he accounted them, but only as bringing men up to the level where real achievement becomes possible. They pertain, after all, only to the husk of man's life. They but represent the meat which is naught except as it strengthens the body, and the raiment which has no value but to preserve bodily warmth. It was the perfection of the products, not of industry, but of thought and character which Lawton made the goal of human progress. But the outward is always easier than the inward; and, though Lawton had sympathizers not a few, who hailed him as the true prophet of the age, his words were by most unheeded.

Though the story is the life-history of a person, it centers on incidents that are social rather than personal in their bearings. The hero is made to marry young, and the story of his love is sweetly told, but early and happy marriages are treated as a matter of course. Instead of being fettered by the loss of those subjects that form the stock-in-trade of nineteenth-century novelists, the writer rejoices in his emancipation, and finds his only embarrassment in the riches of theme and incident opened before him. In many respects we must regard "The Anointed" as the writer's autobiography; but it is no mere diary of thoughts and feelings such as a prisoner might scratch with a nail on the flagging of his cell. It is, rather, a bright, breezy, out-door book. To a nineteenth-century reader the characters seem, indeed, to be always out of doors. The book contains a superb picture of a yacht sail in a storm, and a description of a mountain ramble among the Andes in an air-ship. A feature of the book that would seem duldest to a reader of our day is the minute record of the poet's studies in literary style. Who would have dreamed that so light and magical a structure must have foundations laid so deep in philosophy! The inner meanings of sound, rhythm, rhyme and meter

in poetry, of all that pertains to sentence-building in prose, and, in music, of the peculiarities that result from its production on various instruments—all these meanings were discerned and then made so intimately a part of the poet's nature that they were no longer consciously thought of. The poet practiced with his art until every thought came clothed with its fitting expression, though not, as with us, wholly of one kind, as prose or verse; for prose was not strained to mount into a region that it is not fitted for, neither was poetry weighed down with thoughts that belong to prose, nor, on the other hand, was it urged to the utterance of what is music's natural theme. One single production, as in the case of the novel itself, ran unfettered through all varieties of expression. Finally, the poet attained such perfect technical skill that improvisation became easy, and was, in fact, his only method of composition. But readers in the twenty-fifth century are going to like a plot even better, it would seem, than some novelists of to-day imagine their readers to, and the author of the work before us was not disposed to come short in this regard. With all his large gifts and attainments the hero was unhonored, uncrowned; and the romancer's problem was to untie or cut this Gordian knot in a surprising way. An enormous festival of industry was to take place, at which the old poet Wendon should give the poem. This recital formed the crowning literary event of the occasion and of the year. Thousands were present in person; among them the younger poet, Wilfred Lawton; while millions in their homes also, by the help of instruments, both heard and saw. At the appointed hour the aged poet arose, and, to the astonishment of the multitude, announced that though he had prepared an ode for the occasion he should not deliver it. The day before he had heard by chance some of the productions of a younger poet, which, though known to him, had hitherto made no impression upon his mind. Then, however, he saw as by a lightning flash, that his own face had been turned to the past instead of the future; and that the true poet and the prophet of the new time was the younger man. Wherefore, instead of giving his own poem, he called for an improvisation in the spirit of the newer age, from the poet of the future, Wilfred Lawton. The response of Lawton is given, with its inward assurance to the reader that the poet's fame is established; and with this the story ends.

•

•

•



